

# Guidance for a Buddhist through the Dhamma of his Master

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## Dhamma Guidance 1

### Genesis of Buddhism as a Religion

Buddhism as a religious philosophy was delivered to the world from India more than twenty-five centuries ago, nearly five centuries before the birth of Christ. Its founder is known today as Shakya Muni or Buddha Gautama. He was born of human parents, Suddhodana and Maya. As his father's name Suddha + Odana [Clean Rice] implies, they belonged to a family of rice growers, his paternal uncles being named Washed Rice or Dhota + odana and Abundant Rice or Amita + odana. They were obviously a clan of peace-loving agricultural people, carrying with them no thoughts of aggressive conquests or war in their heads. Nevertheless, they held distinguished positions in society, equating to being provincial rulers or *rājās*.

This young son of Suddhodana was named Siddhartha and he grew up in a happy and comfortable home. In spite of the death of his mother within a week of his birth, Siddhartha grew up under the loving care and guidance of his mother's sister, Gotamī. At his birth, it was predicted of Siddhartha that he would ultimately end up being an enlightened Buddha or would become a Universal Monarch or world ruler, i.e. a *rājā cakkavatti*. Even in the world of scientific beliefs the idea is now gaining ground that humans do carry from birth to birth their own acquired qualities of life, their skills, aptitudes and temperaments, as for instance the musical genius of Mozart. They phrase their conclusion as 'we have every reason to believe that the mind of the un-born child in the mother's womb is pre-monitored'.

Quite in consonance with this more or less scientific belief of today, we gather from books of early Buddhist history that Siddhartha, while he was yet young, displayed many instances of his former life or trans-*samsaric* aptitudes and aspirations which implied his transcendental acquisitions. While he was yet a tender young boy, it is said that while his father was engaged in activities of ploughing his fields for rice growing, Siddhartha displayed the possibility of entering into stages of higher meditative spiritual attainments which at the time were already known to the Indians as *jhanas* [Skt. *dhyana*]. This is to be noted, without fail, as a special feature in Indian religious thinking, specially of the Buddhists, that human life of each individual proceeds in a continuous series, from birth to death and birth again, until the process is terminated through personal choice of human endeavor, without any assistance from or grace of an external savior. This is the Buddhist concept of liberation or redemption.

Thus we are compelled to believe that Siddhartha, in this birth as son of Suddhodana, was gifted with many intellectual and spiritual qualities well above the average. Nevertheless, there was nothing here that one would call divine about them. They imply only higher reaches of humanly possible attainments, indicating the entire gamut of human development in men, women and children,

without any considerations of caste or creed, contributing to the highest happiness of the human in Nirvana, achievable in this very life. It is not a belief in an attainment beyond death. One attains it and enjoys the bliss thereof in this very life, and until up to the time one dies.

Here is a statement of the Buddha himself [from the Buddha Vagga of the Samyutta Nikaya] after his attainment to Buddhahood. "Prior to my enlightenment, while I was still unenlightened, and was aspiring for my enlightenment, a thought like this occurred to me: 'The world of humans is plunged in a serious predicament in that they are born into life, go through it facing maturity and aging, being subject to all manner of disease and dying, passing away from this life and being born in yet another'. Then I asked myself whether there was no way out of this misery.

It is difficult for us to guess at this stage whether the above observations are modern enough or scientific enough to the supersonic Buddhist men and women of today who possess little or no knowledge of the genesis of Buddhism. These observations of Siddhartha as the Buddha aspirant regarding the realities of the life of humans, extending beyond one life time, of dying and being born again, reveals to us the profundity of his pre-enlightenment vision as a human. We wish to maintain that these remarks unquestionably reflect his trans-*saṃsāric* culture or spiritual development. This marks the genesis of truth No. 1 [in the series of Four Noble Truths], i.e. of *dukkha* or unsatisfactoriness in the life process of man. The next prompting in the mind of Siddhartha, as the Buddha aspirant, is to bring about a termination or way out of this suffering of mankind about which he is immensely grieved. This is truth No. 3 which is referred to as *nirodha* or cessation of *dukkha*.

Siddhartha's first conviction is about the reality of *dukkha*, about its existence as a fact of life. It is painful and results so from the inability of the average individual to adapt himself to and contain within himself these unacceptable situations in life. Next to it comes the conviction about the possibility of its

termination or *nirodha*. The wisdom of the Bodhisatta prompts him to look for a causal genesis of both these items. of the process of being born again and again and of bringing about an end of it. Presence what brings about these or as he himself puts the question *kismiṃ sati idaṃ hoti*. He discovers craving or *tanha* to be the cause or source of *dukkha*. This is called *samudaya* and is placed next to *dukkha* as truth No. 2. The way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*, likewise is termed *magga*. It takes its rightful place as truth No. 4. Now it should be clearly seen that all thinking in Buddhism as a religion spins around this thought structure of the Four Noble Truths or *cattari ariya saccani*.



## Dhamma Guidance 2

# Truths of the Religion and their Guidance in Buddhist Living

On the attainment of Enlightenment, the Buddha realised that it was after a great deal of strenuous striving, consisting of trial and error, that he gained his wisdom as the Buddha [*kicchena me adhigataṃ*]. His goal of salvation was so polarised to the way of the world like the conquest of the law of gravity in the triumph of outer space flights that he began to doubt whether people of the world would ever comprehend it or take to it agreeably. It is the way of the world to cling to the sensory gratifications the world offers [*ālaya-ratā ālaya-sammuditā pajā*]. This clinging which keeps the beings of the world tied to *saṃsāric* continuance or being born again and again is called craving or *taṇhā* [i.e. thirsting for]. Therefore Nirvana comes to be called the extinction of craving or *taṇhakkhayo nibbānaṃ*.

The Buddha finally decided to make known his message to the world, in the

first instance to the five erstwhile ascetics with whom he had practiced austerities as the way to enlightenment. The well-known Gandharan statue of the Bodhisatta in a very near skeletal form presents him going through this near-fatal experiment which he boldly declared as a blunder, saying that the way to enlightenment was yet another - *añño maggo bodhāya*. In your study of this statue, fail not to remove the halo placed behind the head of the Bodhisatta who is still experimenting as to how he should get his enlightenment. Finally through a process of healthy living, with moderation in eating, called the middle way or *majjhimā paṭipadā*, avoiding the extremes of gluttonous eating and severe starvation, he attained his enlightenment.



### Dhamma Guidance 3

## Truths of the Religion and their Guidance in Buddhist Living - Contd.

In the list of the Four Noble Truths, we now come to the last one of *magga sacca* or the path leading to the goal. The Dhamma-cakkappavattana Sutta itself names it as the *ariyo atthangiko maggo* or the Noble Eight-fold Path. It is seen to consist of eight different items, commencing with *sammaditthi* or corrected vision and ending with the totally concentrated or gathered-together mind in *samma samadhi*. It is to be noted at the very outset that this *magga* being only the way to Nirvana, is seen leading in the direction of Nirvana, but stopping short of the goal, two stages before the target. For the completion of the journey finally in Nirvana, two more items, namely *samma nana* and *samma vimutti* have to be added. The state of being an *arahant* is said to be thus reached on the completion of ten stages: *dasahi angehi samannagato araha' ti vuccati*.

Going by the evidence of what we believe to be the more authentic suttas like the Janavasabha in the Digha Nikaya where the first seven items of the Path or *magga* are given, as the seven pre-requisite factors or *parikkhara* of *samadhi* [they being referred to as *satta samadhi parikkhara*], we are driven to view the Path as one of successive stages. Each preceding one in the list is given as leading to the latter, the phrasing all the time being like *samma-diithissa samma sankappo pahoti samma sankappassa samma vaca pahoti* etc. Thus we have to look upon this path to liberation as one of successive stages, i.e. each following stage on the path being the product of the preceding state of culture or development. Note the use of the word *pahoti* as a word which means produces or generates as the verb in the list, from the first to the ninth, between the preceding subject object components, even finally as *samma nanassa samma vimutti pahoti*.

At this stage, it is important for serious students of Buddhism to note that it is the addition of items nine and ten to the eight-fold path which gets the Buddhist spiritual aspirant to his final goal in Nirvana. The Eight-fold Path itself is therefore seen to be shorter and much less than the total Buddhist culture leading up to Nirvana. On the other hand, we are also introduced to a system of complete Buddhist spiritual culture consisting of the three stages of *sila*, *samadhi* and *panna* and is known as *tisso sikkha*. This takes a Buddhist aspirant from the basic ground level of *sila* or moral goodness to the final stage of Nirvana with its third item of culture, namely *panna*, through the interim process of mind-culture or *samadhi*. They are severally referred to as *adhi-sila-sikkha*, *adhi-citta-sikha* and *adhi-panna-sikkha*. That constitutes the intense or higher grade culture of moral goodness, mind development and wisdom acquisition.

The well-known Cullvedalla Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya, delivered by Theri Dhammadinna to her erstwhile husband Visakha, tells us very clearly that while the threefold group of culture [*tayo khandha*] can contain within it the Eightfold Path, the Eightfold Path cannot contain within it the threefold culture [*tayo*

*khandha*], This unmistakably supports our view that wisdom or *panna* of the threefold culture of *sikkha* lies well beyond the Eightfold Path. We have already shown above that it lies as No. 9 [= *samma nana* which is the equivalent of *panna*] after *samma samadhi*, well outside the Path [*samma samadhissa samma nanam pahoti*]. By no endeavor whatsoever can *samma ditthi* of the Path be equated to *panna* of the threefold culture. Thus it makes very little sense, or no sense at all, to divide the Eightfold Path into three in terms of the *tisso sikkha*. In the sense that *samma ditthi* and *samma sankappa* open out new vision as Buddhism and stimulate new thinking as Buddhism requires, they may be considered as being associated with or leading to wisdom: *pannakkhandhe sangahita*.

Now let us examine the statement in the Mahavedalla Sutta [?] where the Venerable Sariputta indicates two factors as giving rise to *samma ditthi* [*dve paccaya samma ditthiya uppadaya* loc.cit.]. They are: 1. getting the *dhamma* information from an external source or *parato ghoso* [i.e. not intuitively self-acquired], together with 2. one's own reflection upon it or *yoniso ca manasikaro*. One immediately notices here an initial stage of religious culture or growth in a specific direction. It is this intellectual awareness alone that can install in one the Buddhistness of the new religion. Hence the recurrent use of the phrase *samma-ditthi-pubbangama* or heralded by corrected vision. It is this initial preparatory culture of seeing and doing in *ditthi* and *sankappa* in the unmistakably Buddhist way that grooms the new convert to the creed to carry on his life in the world he lives as a Buddhist. His way of speaking [*samma vaca*], his way of action [*samma kammanto*] and even his way of making a living [*samma ajivo*] must have a distinctly Buddhist flavour.

In the religious culture of Buddhism, we see that these five stages, two of theoretical intellectual correction and three of socio-cultural living in society adequately grooms him for his spiritual ascent from the mundane to the transcendental in the direction of Nirvana. If the concept of item No. 6 in *samma*

*vayamo* is correctly understood, then it becomes quite clear that the movement therefrom is in the direction of a transcendental ascent. All value judgements thereafter are based on eliminating *akusala* and fostering *kusala*, i.e. those contributory and non-contributory to attainment of the goal of Nirvana.

From what has been indicated so far it becomes clear that what is needed for the attainment of Nirvana is not a mere comprehension of the Four Noble Truths [*caturarya-satya-avabodhaya*] but a total incorporation in one's life of their total cultural or growth implications [*tiparivattam dvadasakaram*] as indicated by the Buddha about himself with words like *parinnatam pahinam sacchikatam* and *bhavitam* in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta. Very clearly, this total fulfillment of the Four Noble Truths is the one and only entry into *bodhi* or enlightenment [*abhisambuddho paccansim*].



## Dhamma Guidance 4

# The Basic Elements of the Buddha Dhamma

### ~ *Dukkha* and *Nirodha* ~

In a recurrent statement made by the Buddha he says that he preaches to the world all the time, then and now [*pubbe cā'haṃ bhikkhave etarahi ca*], about *dukkha* and the cessation or *nirodha* of *dukkha* [*dukkhā ca paññāpemi dukkassa ca nirodhaṃ*]. It had to be so, because as the Buddha aspirant, his pre-enlightenment vision centered on the *dukkha* or unsatisfactoriness of the human predicament [... *bodhisattass'eva sato etadahosi kicchaṃ vata'yaṃ loko āpanno*], of being born, dying and being born again, with all the concomitants of decay and disease thrust in between. Thus it becomes clear that the composite idea of the Four Noble Truths originally has its genesis with the basic items 1 and 3, namely



*dukkha* and *nirodha*. At this stage, his logical thrust of the scientific methodology of causal genesis, without any leanings on make-believe divine origins, led the Bodhisatta to the discovery of truths 2 and 4.

There is absolutely no doubt that these Four Noble Truths constitute the sum total of Buddhist thinking, including both its theory and practice. The subsequent elaboration and expansion of these, including even the third *piṭaka* of the Abhidhamma, is no more than re-phrasing and re-handling of the old core material which aimed at no more than leading the *samsāric* human to his transcendental release in Nirvana. It is both clear and definite that the early disciples of the Buddha, in incalculably large numbers, did attain their goal in Nirvana, terminating their *samsāric* journeying, while very little is being said in the early suttas about an Abhidhamma. The Buddha, even towards the last days of his life, i.e. closer to the time of his *parinibbāna*, is seen talking only about the *dhamma* he preached for the deliverance of beings out of *samsāra* to Nirvana and about the Vinaya he laid down for the regulation of the individual and collective lives of monks and nuns [*Yo vo mayā Ānanda dhammo ca vinayo ca desito paññatto so vo mamaccayena satthā*], i.e. the honest men and women who at the time seriously and sincerely sought to liberate themselves from the perilous sea of life, referred to as *sasāroghā mahabbhayā*.

As for the way the Buddha has laid down for the attainment of the ultimate goal in Nirvana, it is constantly stated that it should be individually developed by each one, with his or her own effort and initiative. Thus it becomes abundantly clear that in Buddhism there are no collective prayers for spiritual uplift. Nor is there any heavenly grace that does it. This is the position which the Ratthapala Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya unmistakably lays down that the world is devoid any external refuge or succor for man [*attāno loko*]. The religious culture of Buddhism is essentially self-reformatory. *Samsāric* beings are bonded in the painful process of life continuance because of *avijjā* or their ignorance with regard to the mechanism of life continuance [*avijjā-nīvaraṇanaṃ sattānaṃ*], and the over-

indulgence in their craving for the gratification of sensory delights [*taṇhā-samyōjanānaṃ*] of the world outside.

The wisdom that is suggested as a corrective measure for this is the true understanding of what each of us mistakenly grasps at as being our individuality or selfhood [*attavāda*]. This is severely chastised as the baneful self-identification or *ahaṃkāra*. That is looking upon our personal identity as a permanent, unchanging self that persists through time and space, with almost a divine identity within it. Once this erratic concept gets a foothold on us, there invariably follows its derivative of what belongs to me [*ahaṃkāra-mamiṃkāra-māna-anusaya*], both internally and externally [*ajjhatta bahiddhā vā*]. This disastrously changes our attitude to and relationship with the world we live in.

We take the world to be precisely what our cognitive processes conceive it to be. It is to be understood that there is a serious gap between the reality of the world and what we conceive it to be, i.e. under the command of our wishes and our thinking. We want the things in the world to be permanent [*nicca*], we want them to provide us with happiness and comfort [*sukha*], and for ever be under our command [*atta*]. These attitudes are said to cling on to the human individual and guide his life style until he achieves his final liberation in Nirvana.

First and foremost, in the correction of this attitude, the concept of selfhood has to be disintegrated and eliminated on the basis of the different functional components, both physical and psychical, i.e. the five aggregates or the *pañca-kkhandha* that constitute it. This, beware, is where one has to begin.



## Paticca-samuppada the Chain of Causal Genesis

Pushing further the analysis of one's own personality in terms of the wider *samsaric* dimension, we arrive at the teaching of the Chain of Causal Genesis or *paticca-samuppada*, explaining the ceaseless continuity of *samsara* and the possibility of terminating it. This is clear from the use of words like *paccaya* implying genesis and *nirodha* implying cessation at the end of each item in the list as in *avijja-paccaya* and *avijja-nirodha*. There is not the slightest doubt that in Buddhism, the problem of suffering of man is inextricably linked with his life-continuity in *samsara*, as expressed in the unmistakable statement ... *kicham vata'yam loko apanno jayati ca jiyati ca miyati ca cavati ca uppajjati ca*. At death or *miyati*, i.e. at the end of one's life on earth, we pass on to another life or *cavati*, to be born there again or *uppajjati*. Any concept of human life, at every stage, is always coupled with these triple time wise relationships. It is only the *arhant*, the liberated one, who has completely negated the idea of a life in the future, a life beyond death: *ayam antima jati natthi'dani punabbhavo* or *n'aparam itthattaya'ti pajanati*.

This *samsaric* regenerative power and this alone is the potential of the word *sankhara* [= *upadana* in the *paticcasamuppada* series], both in the *pancakhandha* and the *paticca-samuppada*. In the *pancakhandha* series, cognitive activities of *vedana* and *sanna* are followed by the erratic process of *samsara*-building through *sankhara* [equated to processes like *vitakketi* and *papanceti* elsewhere like the Madupindika Sutta]. In the *paticca-samuppada*, it is *avijja* which is presented as propelling beings to *samsaric* continuance through the production of *sankhara* as in *avijja paccaya sankhara sankhara-paccaya vinnanam*.

It is best that we indicate at this stage that Buddhist thinking is not Buddhist at all if we do not seriously reckon with the fact of *samsara* as an integral part of it. *Samsara* would be equally incomprehensible if we do not incorporate with it the idea of *vinnana* or the personal psychic component of each individual being.

Buddhist texts are unanimous in stating that it is the joint activity of *nama-rupa*, i.e. the physical basis of human life contributed by the parents, together with *vinnana* [*nama-rupam saha vinnanena*] that sets in motion the *samsaric* journeying of humans. It is for this reason that these two items of the Causal Chain are referred to as conjoint factors or *annamanna-paccaya*. It is our belief that the valid and meaningful continuity of *samsara* becomes tenable only through such concepts like *vinnana-sota* or *vinnanic-flow* [at .....] and *samvattanika-vinnana* or incessantly continuing element of individual or personal consciousness of the human at different levels [as at].

The best evidence in support of this idea of ceaseless combined continuity of *vinnana* and *nama-rupa* in the life of the human occurs in the Mahanidana Sutta of the Digha Nikaya where it is stated that if *vinnana* [i.e. *samvattanika vinnana* which conditionally exists at *samsaric* level and is referred to as *paticca-samuppanna*] does not descend into the mother's womb [i.e. the abdominal cavity, possibly including even the Fallopian tube], the zygote within the mother, fertilised through the successful union of the parental sperm and ova, would not commence its growth process. It is this arrival of the *vinnana* and its union with the *nama-rupa* within the mother which signals or sets in motion the growth of sense organs or *salayatana* out of the *nama-rupa* [*nama-paccaya salayatana*]. From there onwards commences the process of *phassa* or sensory reaction, establishing connections with the world we live in [at least of hearing while still within the mother's womb] and thereby providing the basis for the continuance of the life process, through reaching up to and grasping [i.e. *upa + adana*] the sensory stimuli. This phase of the life process is referred to as *upadana paccaya bhavo*. Thus when one has acquired enough credit for the continuance of the life process, i.e. *bhava*, one must necessarily get born in some life form [this and this alone being the import of the word *jati*], thus acquiring the derivative of *bhava* in *jati* [*bava paccaya jati*]. With born into life or *jati*, all other ills of life like *jara marana* naturally follow.

In the study of the *paticca-samuppada*, for the guidance of one's life as a Buddhist, i.e. for the termination of the journeying in the *samsaric* process, serious notice has to be taken at the point where one begins one's communication with the world in such a way, while we are in blissful ignorance, that it leads to the drastic result of *samsara* prolongation. One needs to endeavour to be cautious enough not to get dragged into or involved in welcoming the enticements or seductions of the world [*na abhivadati*], not in rejoicing therein [*na abhinandati*] and not in joyously dwelling in their midst [*na ajjhosaya titthati*]. To be unsuspectingly trapped in or immersed in these activities is declared to be an involuntary invitation to *dukkha*, Buddhist texts repeatedly speak of the avoidance of these unwise reactions as leading to the termination of *dukkha* [*es'eva'nto dukkhassa*]. Preceding this action level of amassing *dukkha* stand the psychic thought level activity of *vitakka* and *papanca*, quoted earlier from the Madhupindika which are referred to thereas *samsara*-processing.

Having thus seen in the *paticca-samuppada* series the three-dimensional character of involving three lives, i.e. of the present in relation to the past wherein lie its roots, the living reality of the present and its fructification in the future where the *kammic* activities of the present bear their fruit, we would find it uncalled for to press the activities of the *paticcasamuppada* into one single life time. With its consistent references to a life beyond the present as in *kayassa bheda parammarana* or in *idha modati pecca modati*, Buddhist teachings lay stress all the time on the consequences of what we do not only on this life but even in lives beyond. The vastness of the life process of the human, until its termination in Nirvana, as is visualised in Buddhism, is more than adequately expressed in statements like *anamatagg'ayam bhikkhave samsaro pubba koti na pannayati*.



## Dhamma Guidance 6

# Kamma / Buddhist Theory of Action and its Consequences

In Buddhism, we would almost begin by tracing back action to its motive or *cetana* itself. The Buddha himself is said to have stated that motive itself is action: *cetana 'ham bhikkhave kammam vadami*. Action through thought, word and deed [*kayena vacaya manasa*] springs out of willing or mental planning [*cetayitva kammam karoti*]. We would look upon *ceteti* [the basic word involved here] as indicating the activity aspect or thinking out in the mind. This by-product of the joint activity of the mind-body combination of *nama-rupa* and *vinnana* is the sole driving force of human life in *samsara*, in one life time or in its trans-samsaric aspect.

Good and bad results of life-activity flow out of this as registered in the Dhammapada verses 1 & 2 with the words *manasa ce padutthena* and *manasa ce pasanena* with the following activity of *bhasati va kroti va* with their ensuing results *tato nam dukkha* and *tato nam sukham anveti*. Thus it becomes clear that *kamma* is part and parcel of the living reality of life: *kamma-bandhu* and *kamma-yoni*. It propels life in *samsara*. Therefore the Noble Eightfold Path which brings about the cessation of the *samsaric* process of journeying is called the way to terminate *kamma* or *kamma-nirodha-gamani-patipada*.



## Dhamma Guidance 7

# Worship and Prayer their rightful place in Buddhism

The basic position of Buddhism as a religion is that it offers no external

source of divine power to whom the mortals of the world, with their self-imposed feeling of helplessness, can go in search of shelter and protection: *attano loko* [Majjhima Nikaya / Ratthapala Sutta]. We arrive at this position from what are believed to be authentic Buddhist teachings of the Pali Canon. This is quite apart from what the Sri Lankan Buddhists of yesterday have believed in or what both monks and laymen of today practice in their daily lives. That human thinking undergoes change through time and space is readily conceded. There is ample evidence for this. But we are also inclined to accept that Buddhist teachings are of transcendental origin and for that reason said to be true for all times or *sanatano* and not bonded by time space considerations, i.e. *akaliko*. They shall hold true for all times.

When and where do humans need shelter and protection? As the Buddhist texts themselves say 'when they are stricken with fear and insecurity' or *manussa bhaya-tajjita*. Within man himself, there invariably appears insecurity of life on account of disease and death. But Buddhism forewarns man all the time about the invariability of death through natural causes or otherwise, i.e. accidents or manipulation by man himself against man. It lays bare consistently the stark reality that no mortal shall ever evade death: *na hi so upakkamo atthi yena jata na miyyare* [= there is no device whatsoever whereby mortals shall escape death] or *natthi jatassa amaranam* [= to him who is born, death is part and parcel of life].

Accidents of all sorts can externally threaten the life of man, on land, sea or air. Man himself may threaten the life of man, singly or collectively, in peace and in war, in the name of religion, ethnicity and political ideologies. In the global insanity of the world today, these are claimed to be committed through divine sanctions and commands from heaven. In the religious thinking in many parts of the world, Gods in the heavens above, wherever that be, each in his own way, seem to be driving the stupid mortals below, in specific regions of the earth, to exterminate their neighbouring rival groups, in order to extend their own heavenly

kingdoms above.

Buddhism as a religious philosophy does not lean on any such just or unjust Gods to serve the needs of humans. This anthropocentric attitude goes so far also to say that no divine power guides the destiny of the world: *anabhissaro* [See Ratthapala Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya quoted above.]. The position of man in the whirl of human existence or *samsara* is one of his own creation. That is where all the ills of life are engulfed. The termination of this process is also therefore left in the hands of the human himself, to be undertaken and accomplished, by himself, through his own energetic and enlightened endeavour. It is not by worship of or prayers to any promised unknown and believed-in powers beyond the ken of man.

Buddhism tells us that it is the way of the world to stimulate the human with all manner of sensory delights, via his diverse sense organs like the eye and the ear, the nose and the tongue etc. The greater part of the philosophy of Buddhism therefore deals with the successful handling of the world by man, by pursuing a philosophy of moderation, realising fully well its danger zones. To begin with, it is no secret that the world provides the ways and means for the survival of man on earth. Man reaches out for his food and drink this way. So does he protect himself against the dangers of wind and rain, thunder and lightning, by building up a sensible network of relationships with the world around him.

In India, even thousands of years before the emergence of Buddhism, the Vedic Aryans appear to be harnessing nature for the fulfilment of their daily needs and furtherance of their life ambitions. They prayed to these gods whom they created out of the powerful natural phenomena like wind and rain, thunder and lightning which were close to them and which surrounded them. They asked them for, among others, wealth, food and heroic sons [*rayim viravatim isam*]. They also wanted these gods to preside over the prosperity of man as well as to protect their moral goodness. For this purpose, they appointed gods as guardians of the moral order in the universe. Indra and Varuna were appointed



as guardians of the moral law which they named *rta: rtasya gopau*.

In the teachings of Buddhism, on the other hand. it is the goodness of man, his thinking and his way of living that maintains law and order in the universe. No gods handle it from anywhere outside. Orderly living by man in itself is the moral order of the universe. That is what comes to be called *dharma* [Pali *dhamma*] or Law of Righteousness in the world. That upholds the world and keeps it in place. *Dhamma* protects him who lives according to it: *dhammo have rakkhati dhamma-carim*. Living in accordance with it brings happiness in life: *dhammo sucinno sukham avahati*. Such a man shall never descend to a lower grade in his next life after death: *na duggatim gacchahti dhamma-cari*. Establishing oneself in good-living or being *dhammattha* or being endowed with moral goodness [i.e. *sila-sapanna*] is deemed adequate even to get one to the blissful worlds after death: *dhammattha sila-sampanna te jana sagga-gamino* [SN. I.?).

Human endeavour and human enterprise or *utthana* is always held in high esteem in Buddhism. The real source of wealth for human needs is traced back to striving and energetic application as implied in statements like *utthata vindate dhanam* [= a person with energetic application earns wealth for himself] or *utthana-viriyadhigatam dhanam*, or wealth acquired through energetic application. Life of the householder, without such qualities like *utthana* which generate success, is held in low esteem and is severely chastised as in *anuttahana-mala ghara* in the Dhammapada. In religious life too, the virtue of *utthana* does occupy an equally esteemed position as in the statement: *uttithe nappamajjeyya dhammam sucaritam care* [= Rise up to act. Waste not a moment. Live the good life perfectly well]. Here too, the word *uttithe* unmistakably means rise up in readiness to act. Together with the following word *nappamajjeyya*, the two words mean 'Rise up to act and waste no time'. The following statement backs it up with the idea 'live the good life perfectly well': *dhammam sucaritam care*. Most modern translators, both English and Sinhala, give to the word *uttitha* in both places most lamentably meaningless translations

like ` while being out on the alms round'.

Thus we see that Buddhism looks upon success in human life as emerging from the wise judgement of humans and their honest endeavour and application, living in accordance with the *dhamma*. They cannot look up to any other external source, either divine or magically mysterious, for worship and prayer. It is recorded in Buddhist books that fear-stricken people [*manussa bhayatajjita*] take refuge in and pay homage to mountains and trees [*bahum ve saranam yanti pabbatani vanani ca arama-rukkha-reetiyan*]. In Buddhism, the need to pray to such external sources of divine grace is strictly ruled out.

Calamitous situations which humans have to face from time to time are analysed and examined as to their origin. Elemental violence like thunder and lightening, earth quakes and volcanic eruptions, floods and tidal waves like *tsunami* and typhoons strike humans without warning. To the Buddhist, it would be no more than infantile imagination to ascribe these to divine wrath and vindictiveness. Parental relationships which humans wish to maintain and rejoice over, are known to have their genesis visibly on earth down here. Humans know how fatherly love should express itself. With universal heavenly love, they could not accept anything less, or anything different. With unmarried mothers and fatherless homes, the world today is being compelled to witness and to accept the lamentable disintegration and tragic breakdown of these basic human virtues like parental love.

With the proliferation of paternity in heaven, consequent on the increase of ethnic and regional diversities on earth below, this serene concept of more than terrestrial fatherly love in heaven is now seen to be turning ruthlessly retaliatory and revengeful. This is unthinkable and unimaginable in the saner world. Whether in the home or in the heavens above, this has to be put right. Mercy does not need to be prayed for. It has to be the outcome of human friendliness which has to be cultivated here on earth. This is what Buddhism has advocated for over two and a half millennia, to be practised globally as *maitri* or *metta*. It

must embrace the totality of the *biota* as a whole. It is the total elimination of hostility of man, to everybody and everything around him, stretching over man, bird and beast, not forgetting even the plant world, bringing the entire ecosystem within the friendly relationship of man. Scientific attitude of Biophilia Hypothesis requires this of us today, for the very survival of man on this planet. Buddhism has insisted on this for twenty-five centuries up to date.

Buddhism explains most of these difficulties in human life as part and parcel of the very process of human living. Diseases and consequent decay inherently belong to the bodies of flesh and blood we possess, and to the way we eat and drink and to our own life styles. Medical research gives us every day more and more convincing evidence about these. Man's misdirection of himself and mishandling of the environment in which he lives is one major contributory factor to this global disaster of the human. Buddhists have to uphold this thinking with conviction and regulate their life styles as required, without offending the biota in whose midst we live.

Yet another major factor which the Buddhists have to reckon with regarding the fortunes and misfortunes they go through in life, as well as their accomplishments like intellectual and other skills which they inherit more or less from birth, is what Buddhism regards as one's own *karmic* continuity [*yatha-kammupage satte*]. This is what we have already referred to as one's temperament or bent of mind as being benevolent or malevolent [*manasa ce pasannena* or *manasa ce padutthena*]. This is said to condition one's *trans-samsaric vinnana* [which is *paticca-samuppanna* or conditionally generated and not static and unchanging as believed to be i.e. *tadev'idam vinnanam anannam*. Note Sati's heresy in the ..... in the Majjhima Nikaya .....]. Modern medical research findings seem to converge on this when they now declare that 'the mind of the unborn child in the mother's womb is pre-monitored'.

These observations are by no means the product of high-brow thinking of Buddhist scholarship. It is Buddhist thinking itself. But the impact of numerous

non-Buddhist religious systems and cultural inroads into the religious thinking of the Buddhists over the centuries have made them accept and adopt many contradictory beliefs and practices, aided and abetted by their own religious clergy. After the passing away of the Buddha, the early Buddhist adherents adored the three-fold *cetiyas* of i. the *stupa* or *dagaba* containing the bone-relics of the Buddha, ii. the *bodhi*-tree under which the Buddha sat during his enlightenment, and iii. *patima* or images of the Buddha, turned out of clay, metal and wood. All these centred on the life of the Buddha and turned out to be the sole objects of veneration and adoration by the adherents of the faith. This grateful admiration of the Master and the appreciation of the service he rendered to mankind was the only form of worship they adopted, no more and no less.

In course of time, this process of adoration was extended to the teachings left behind by the Buddha, i.e. the *dhamma* he preached and to the body of exemplary disciples he had established during his life time, i.e. the *sangha*. The words uttered during this form of worship, beginning with i. *iti'pi so bhagava* for the Buddha, ii. *svakkhato bhagavata dhammo* for the Dhamma and iii. *supatipanno bhagavato savaka-sangho* for the Sangha, if their meaning is adequately known, would impress on the worshipper that it is no more than an act of admiration of the three major components of the religion which give it the vibrancy and make it a living reality for all time.

Man also seems to believe in the existence of a powerful realm of planets which has both benevolent and malevolent influence on humans on earth [whether these are voluntarily exerted or self-operative, we do not know]. These planets are identified as Sun, Moon, Jupiter, Saturn, Mercury and others. They are believed to determine at birth the temperaments, intellectual capacities etc. of humans, cause different kinds of diseases and ailments in humans during their life time, and increase and decrease their fortunes. People believe that they are totally in the grip of these planets as determined by their birth time. Traditional groups of professional masters in India and Sri Lanka handle the art of teaching

about this system and perpetuating its beliefs. They provide the machinery for curative chanting and making propitiatory offerings of varied types to diverse divinities believed in. They are both elaborate and at times exceedingly expensive. But the patronage they enjoy is incredibly vast.

Buddhists also seem to have taken over and adopted these beliefs and practices, both in pursuit of worldly pleasures and success in their lives as well as for security against all manner of dangers and perils. How far back in Buddhist history we can trace the infiltration of these or under whose cultural pressure, it is difficult to guess. Even stories in the Jataka collection show the wide-spread prevalence of belief in auspicious times or good *nakshatra* [Sinala *naekata*]. For achieving success in all undertakings, auspicious moments were selected according to astronomical calculations and strictly adhered to.

Sri Lankan Buddhists are constantly being made aware of impending disasters on the lives of men, women and children of all ranks and positions in life. These invariably include the highest among our statesmen and stateswomen, and even the most eminent among religious dignitaries. The experts who indulge in these forecasts and predictions are also astrologers of very great reputation, both monk and laymen. These experts have tremendous power over all grades of persons in the land and are made famous both through the media and through personal gossip of word to word communication by well-wishers. These predictions and warnings pertain to all manner of calamities like diseases [presumably not undetectable by modern scanners], and deaths through violent accidents and treacherous manipulation.

This has unfortunately led, in the hands of Buddhist medicine-men and astrological experts, possibly of both groups of monk and layman, to harness for talismanic purposes, the spiritual and transcendental powers of the Buddha, which he gained only on the attainment of Buddha-hood. It must be remembered that these are already listed in the nine-fold-virtue group or *nava-guna*, referred to even in early Buddhist texts, together with virtues eulogising the *dhamma* and

the *sangha*. This listing is solely for the purpose of adoration and paying homage to the sacred trinity of the Buddhist, i.e. the Buddha, together with the Dhamma and the Sangha.

In recent years, Sri Lankan astrologers and astrologer monks have, harnessing those nine virtues of the Buddha, composed a talismanic chant called the *nava-graha-yantraya* or the chant to ward off the ill effects of the nine-fold planetary divinities [*nava-graha*]. This chant which specifies each of the nine virtues of the Buddha like *araha* [Pali *arahant*] for fighting against and overpowering the evil effects of each planet has now come to be included in all the standard books on Parittas, compiled and published by some of the eminent Nayaka Theras of Sri Lanka who are living both in the island and abroad. Thus both the books and the practices have come to acquire world wide popularity and acceptance, solely in the hands of Sri Lankan immigrants who, in their travel abroad carry with them a total domestic cargo, including even the moth-eaten traditions of their native land.

We deem it worthwhile to indicate here a few examples of the abuse of one's religious concepts for vulgarised talismanic purposes. We reproduce first a few samples of the chant [*Buduguna Shantiya*] in Sinhala and give its meaning in English.

- i. *araham budu-gunen mage lruge apala duruveva*  
*leda-duk biya novi kisit saepata satuta lam veva.*

= By the Buddha's virtue of being *araham*  
may the ill-effects of the Sun which are upon me disappear.  
May there be no dread of any disease.  
May comfort and happiness dawn upon my life.

- ii. *samma-sambuddha tedin Sanduge apala duruveva*  
*maraka badhaka vaelaki mage paetum itu veva.*

= By the Buddha's virtue of being *samma-sambuddha*  
 may the ill effects of the Moon which are upon me disappear.  
 May all threats of death vanish and all my wishes be fulfilled.

In this manner, all the nine transcendental virtues [i.e. the *nava-budu-guna*] of the Buddha are invoked and a prayer is made on that account that the ill effects which are due to come upon a human on account of all the nine planets be eliminated and all prosperity and fortune be brought upon him. After i. *Iru* [Sun] and ii. *Sandu* [Moon] as visible planets in the sky, the other planets iii, *Angaharu* [Mars], iv. *Budha* [Mercury], v. *Guru* [Jupiter], vi. *Sikuru* [Venus], vii. *Senasuru* [Saturn], viii. *Rahu* [Solar eclipse?] and ix. *Ketu* [Lunar eclipse?] are brought on the scene in succession, they are invoked, together with the successive Buddha-virtues to dispel the planetary ill effects and bring about success and good fortune.

Between the astronomical details regarding these planets of the solar system and their utilisation in Indian astrology there seems to be considerable differences. Whatever astronomical influence these planets have on the life of humans on earth, Indian mythology assigns to them a great deal of mysterious divine power over humans, over their personal character, including their intellect and emotions, as well as their physical and mental health. In this belief, offerings and prayers [*puja*] are made, supplicating them for benevolent reactions. In this process, the Buddhists go a step further, utilising more the power of the nine-fold virtues [*nava-guna*] of the Buddha to bring about these changes as in the prayer *vijjacarane balayen angahru-dos duruveva*. It is also known that specific offerings which are specially agreeable to these planetary divinities are made by the afflicted persons.

